

Cadillacs for us. And at the corner where I go north, they stare as Leroy hazes the bus till I can get aboard.

The driver takes my last quarter, looks me over. "Room toward the back," he says, frowning and shaking his head at the setting sun.

KATE

came through town with her
corncob pipe and her stash and
her mucusless diet.

Kate has had her share of
troubles: two abortions, an
IUD embedded in the wall of
her uterus and a tubal ligation
with complications.

Kate wants only her dream place:
75 acres of wooded land, a fresh
water lake and nobody else for
miles.

"I plan to drag logs through the
forest," she says, "and make a
log house and get inside with
those big logs all around me."

HOUSEWIFE

She does not
look

into

mirrors, she
looks

at

them to make
sure they are

clean.

PAST PERFORMANCES

I look at the outstretched hand and then at the man behind it who says, "You're Mary's second husband, right? She's got your picture under some stuff in the attic."

"I was third."

"And I'm fifth. But last, friend. She's one changed gal."

The horses are acting up in the paddock. Fillies and maiden fillies at that. Whatever their minds are on, it's not running.

"So. Mary says you're out here every day." He shook his head. "Every day, Jesus. You must be awful lonely." He looks at his program. And his 50¢ tout sheet. And two newspapers. "Everybody picks that favorite."

That favorite is all Jolson eyes and kidney sweat. The jockey crosses himself, gets a leg up and then bails out as she tries a Pegasus.

"So what about it? You're the handicapper."

"Hard to say. I wouldn't bet the rent, though."

"Bullshit. Big horseplayer, big gambler, big knowitall big shot. Mary told me how often you won. She got old waiting for a winner. I come out once a year and even I know a Syndicate horse when I see one. That baby is hopped to the eyes. She'll win and then some. Get smart finally."

Nothing to do but tourist, so I walk down to the turn and watch the jockies pump. The short-price hangs on for third.

16,000 people at the track and I bump into him again, he's coming out of the show line rubbing his dimes together.

"Don't give me that look," he says. "Mary told me all about you, you superior bastard. She told me everything. She said she hated you, she hated you from the beginning, she hated everything you stood for. You were like the others. You were crazy and you tried to drive her crazy. But she's happy with me now, goddamned happy and everything's fine. I've got the most wonderful little lady in the world and you've got nothing. Christ, do I pity you."

He drew a little crowd, like a coronary. I left him there with the people nudging each other and side-mouthing it and went over to the bar, had a drink, and looked at the next race.

-- Ronald Koertge

Pasadena CA

CLOCKWORK BARLEY

g. is in his mid-20's
and has been drinking in the bar
for as long as any of us can remember,
so much so that we don't really consider the place
open for business until he arrives, doffs his hans brinker
cap,
and orders a bud.
he's drunk a lot of the time,
often rather early in the day,
but he never gets loud or surly or abusive.
yes, his drinking manners are impeccable,
and he can still comport himself with dignity